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Continuity of style

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The same model, painted differently:

Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem, 1630 and the *Head of an old man in a cap*, ca. 1630 by Rembrandt both portray old men whose faces bear a noticeable resemblance to that of Philip in the present painting. However, the style of painting in these works is radically different and therefore a direct comparison between them is impossible. (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Detail of *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*, by Rembrandt 1630, oil on panel. Rijksmuseum (58 cm x 46 cm) detail and Rembrandt, *Head of an old man in a cap*, ca. 1630, Panel, 24.3 x 20.3 cm, Kingston, Ontario, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 46-031.

Observation:

Some viewers of this painting have drawn comparisons between the head of an *Old Man in a cap*, Philip's head in the present painting, and *Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem*.¹ However, this comparison is problematic, since like is not being compared with like. The style of painting in each work corresponds to its subject matter. The old man in the painting is more roughly painted, as a tronie related to a specific context: his figure slightly more bent to the right is included in a biblical landscape and is intended to be seen from a distance, unlike the full-length portrait of the apostle, which can be viewed from very close hand. In each case the style differs. It is dictated by the purpose it fulfils. In the present painting, for example, Philip is shown in an attitude of deep concentration, in the act of baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, a high dignitary from the kingdom of Meroe, and is seen from a distance inserted in the landscape.

¹ These viewers of the painting are often the same ones who have mistaken what is in fact erroneous retouching, performed by previous restorers of the painting, with clumsy work done by hypothetical pupils of Rembrandt. They make this mistake because they have failed to perceive that the boards on which the painting was made have moved over time, and consequently the surface of the painting has cracked along the join. These viewers tend also to focus on the clumsy foreshortening of Philip's arm, without noticing that Vliet copied it exactly, or that these unrealistic foreshortening of arms and legs can be found in many other Rembrandt paintings (the most characteristic of which is *Christ Appearing to Magdalene*). They use these arguments to conclude that the painting could not have been made by Rembrandt alone, whereas in fact, the reverse is true: these clues are actually more likely to signify that the work is from the master's own hand. Moreover, most of these viewers have been also unable to relate the obvious the iconographical anomalies that Van Vliet could have made a mechanical transfer of the figures from Rembrandt's original horizontal composition, in order to make the change to a vertical format.

The same painting style for a face with similar morphology: “a rapidly painted head”.



Fig. 2 In reference to the *Old Man in a Cap* and Philip, Ernst van de Wetering wrote: “There is probably other trace of the same painting: a rapidly painted head, done in broad strokes, of an old man bending forward.” Ernst van de Wetering.

(Rembrandt, *A Life in 180 paintings*, Edit. Local World. Amsterdam. April 2008 p. 46.)

While no stylistic comparison can be made between the *Old Man with the cap* and *Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem*, it is safe to establish a direct relationship between the *Old Man* and the head of Philip about the likeness of the face and the style. It seems more reasonable to consider that the head of an *Old Man in a Cap* served as the ‘tronic’ for Philip. The technique used is highly comparable in spite of the great differences in scale and context (fig.2). According to Fernando García García: “The execution of Philip’s head in smaller size in a landscape with this scale requires more complex hand control with less ample brushstrokes than for the tronic itself.” Rembrandt used this rough technique to maintain the same attitude for the figure, independent of the scale.

Following Ernst van de Wetering, Gary Schwartz emphasizes the direct relationship between the *Old Man* and Philip, “Philip has all the appearance of being painted from the same model who sat for the head of an *Old Man in a Cap* from the same period. [...] The resemblance goes further than the outer appearance of the model. It extends to the facial structure and the means used by the artist to depict it.”

Even though there are very similar brushstroke, the large difference in scale and the restoration of eyebrows and realignment of the eyes on and around the joint zone of the boards must be considered. The restoration was made on the advice of Michiel Franken in five brushstrokes respecting the facial lines and leaving intact the rest of the face and the head contour (fig.3).



Fig. 3 *The Old Man in a Cap* 1630, the present painting (reverse) and Philip's head (reverse) after restoration (eyebrows and realignment of the eyes) in the area where the boards were joined.



Fig. 4 Brushstrokes in *the Old Man in a Cap* ca. 1630 and on the unrestored part of Philip's forehead inverse set in the same alignment and the beard.

A similar painting technique used for entirely different facial morphologies and attitudes:

The Laughing man, c. 1629-1630 (15,3 cm x 12,2 cm) and the head of the commanding horseman of *the Baptism of the Eunuch* 1630-1631 (2 cm x 1,5cm) show figures in entirely different attitudes, but are painted with a similar technique (fig. 5). These characters are also located on different planes; however, the brushstrokes are very similar.

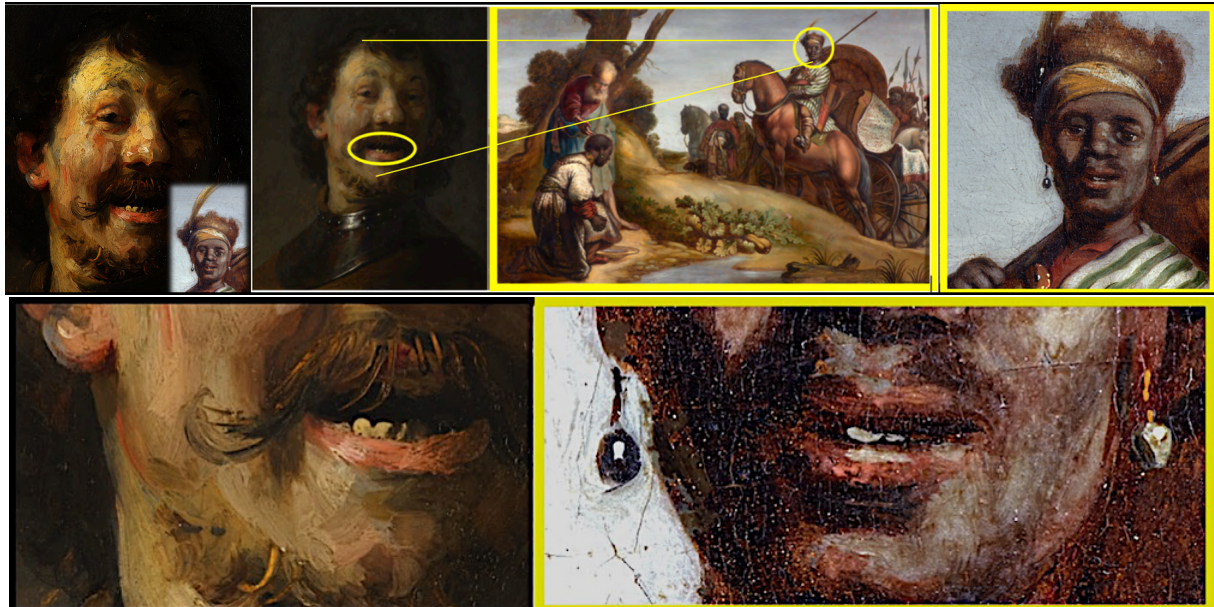


Fig. 5 *The Laughing man* by Rembrandt 1629-1630, Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, (15.3 cm x 12.2 cm), on copper plate covered in gold leaf and the present painting c.a. 1631, commanding horseman's head (2cm x 1cm). Close resemblance of the mouths despite their different expressions, sizes and supports. Details of mouths and teeth, on different scales: *The Laughing Man*, 1629-1630 (2,04 cm) and the horseman from the present painting 1631 ca. (1cm).

Visible resemblance in the brush marks, expressing radically different attitudes and considerable differences of scale and support:

The Laughing Man's eyes are shining, and his teeth are crooked. He is laughing heartily. The horseman, on the other hand, fixes the viewer with an intent and penetrating gaze. The portrait of the *Laughing Man* is a character study that Rembrandt painted while he was living in Leiden. It displays the smooth style that suited his purpose (fig.5). The brushstrokes that make up the head are incredibly supple and roughly done, and the artist used this technique again afterwards for his portrait, *Head of an Old Man in a Cap*, for Philip in the foreground of the present painting and for the commanding horseman in its middle ground (this figure has not been restored).

Observation:

It should be noted that the rough style used for Philip in the foreground resembles that used for the *Old Man*, while in the case of the commanding horseman in the middle ground, the technique is closer to the one used for the *Laughing Man*

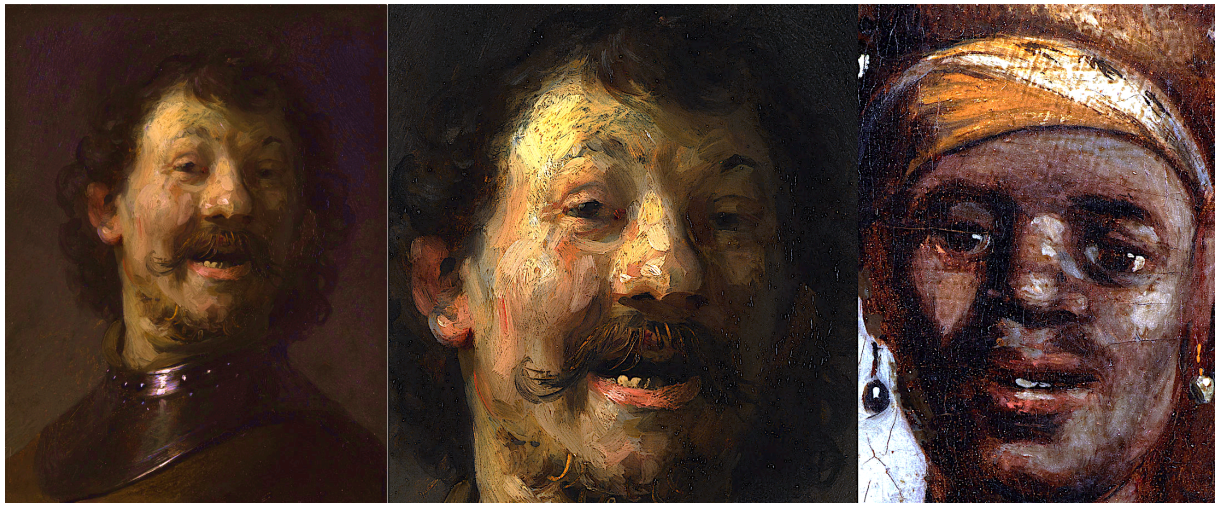


Fig. 5 *The laughing man* portrait 5,2 x 12,2 cm (detail) in strong contrast and the head of the commanding horseman. Visible similar brushstrokes despite of difference of expressions and scale.

From 3D effects in the foreground and the middle ground, to the sketchily done shapes with persuasive expressions in the background (fig. 6-7):

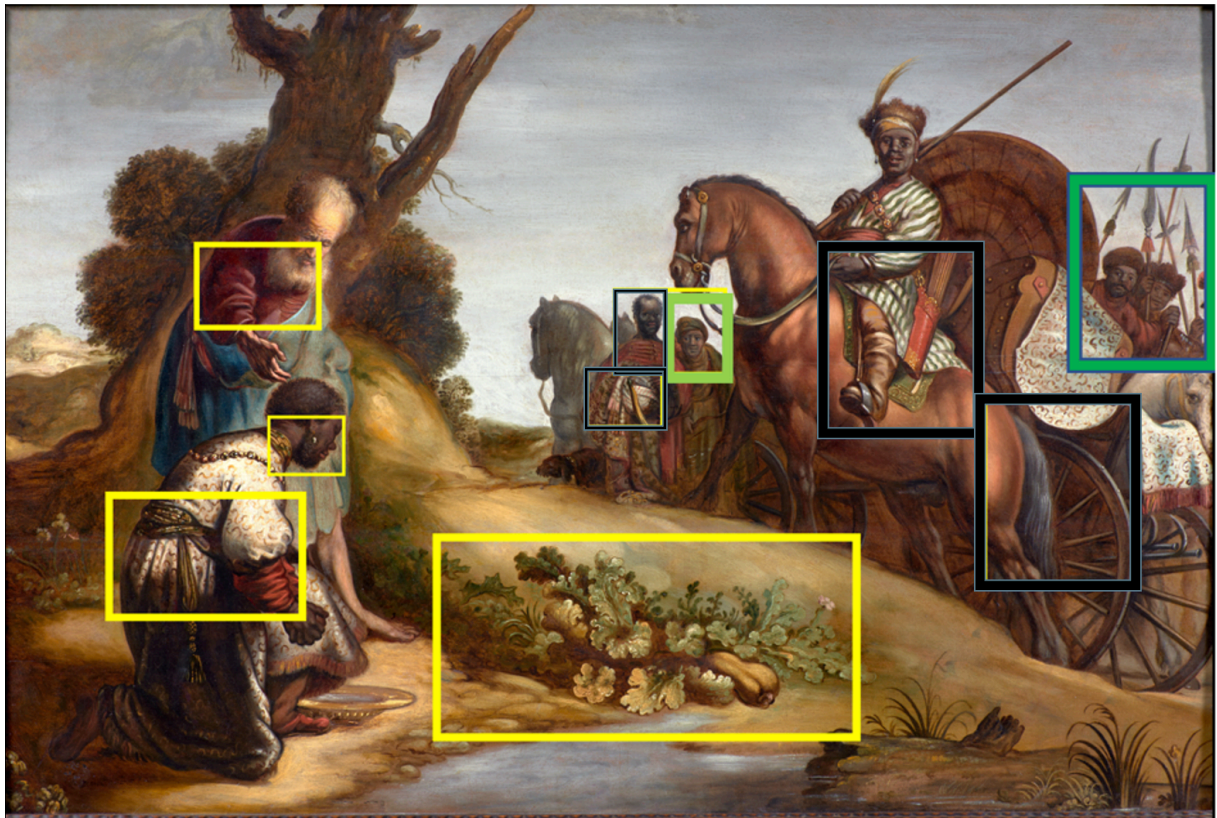


Fig. 6 the 3D on the foreground (yellow), black on the middle ground and sketchy on the background (green).

From the 3D effect on the foreground to the sketchy manner with a persuasive expression:

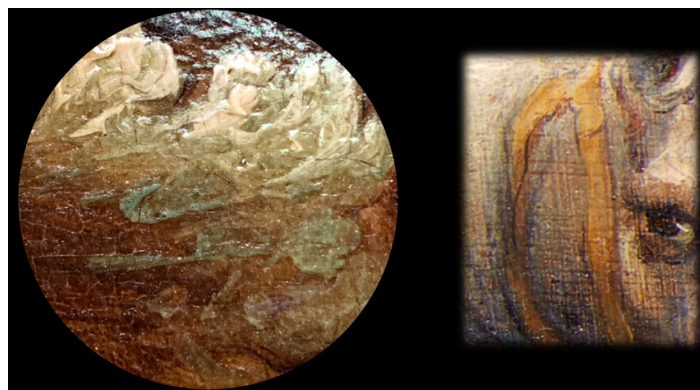


Fig. 7 Three-D with thick impasto and painted drawing without thickness.

An apparent weakness: the loss of three-dimensionality in the eunuch's sleeve is due to the movement of the boards over the join, which has been badly restored. (fig. 8)

This has led to an erroneous observation: that there is no effective three dimensionality in this part of the foreground of the painting.

In contrast with the precise rendering and three-dimensionality of the rest of the fabric that makes up the eunuch's clothing, the flat, blurred effect found on a small surface of the sleeve is the result of previous, poorly done restoration work. The restorer simply filled in the space between the two boards with gesso and roughly painted it over, without accurately respecting the continuity of the original voluminous surface or the forms of the fabric's pattern.

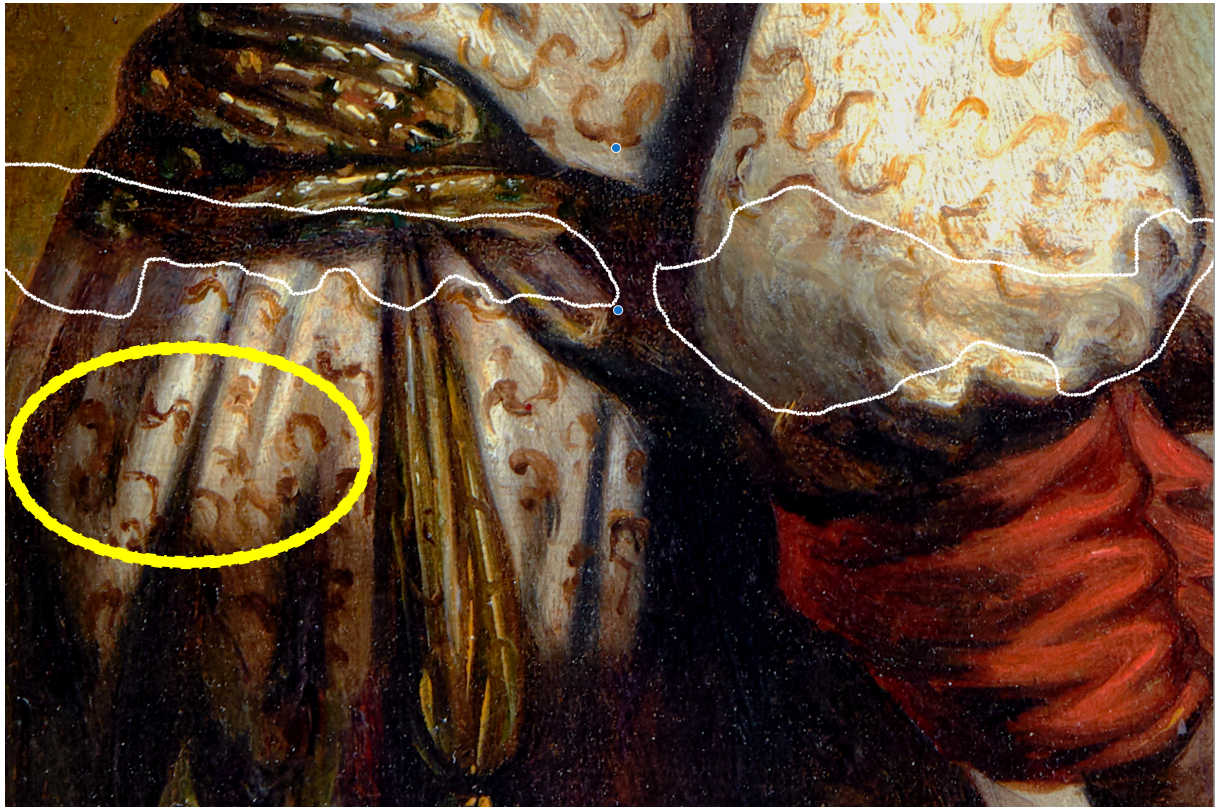


Fig. 8 Demarcated area of the awkward restoration that breaks the three-dimensional effect created above and beyond the movement zone of the boards. Blur zone with white lines, three-dimensions extract in the yellow circle.

Important:

Some viewers of the painting, who did not detect that the problem had been caused by the movement of the boards, seized on this lack of three dimensionality as an argument for believing that the work must have been done by a student from Rembrandt's studio. The detail was not corrected by the most recent restorer. In fact, other experts have noticed an interesting contrast between the 3D effect above and below the two boards. They can see that this clumsy detail is actually evidence of a previous, poorly done restoration, which unfortunately plagues several

areas of the painting, and is especially evident in the area where the boards were joined (e.g., the eye of the warhorse's head).

3-D effect in the foreground, made with a thick impasto:

Thick brushstrokes, applied onto a wooden support with a consistent volume, produce substantial surface reliefs. Rembrandt used the typical colours and pigments of his era, including several white lead-based pigments and organic materials (mainly linseed oil). The surface relief, 3D effect, is possibly also due to a plumbonacrite ingredient (fig.9-10).²



Fig. 9 Leaves made with thick impasto.

The leaves and the golden chain of the eunuch are almost of sculptured to give the illusion of a reality.

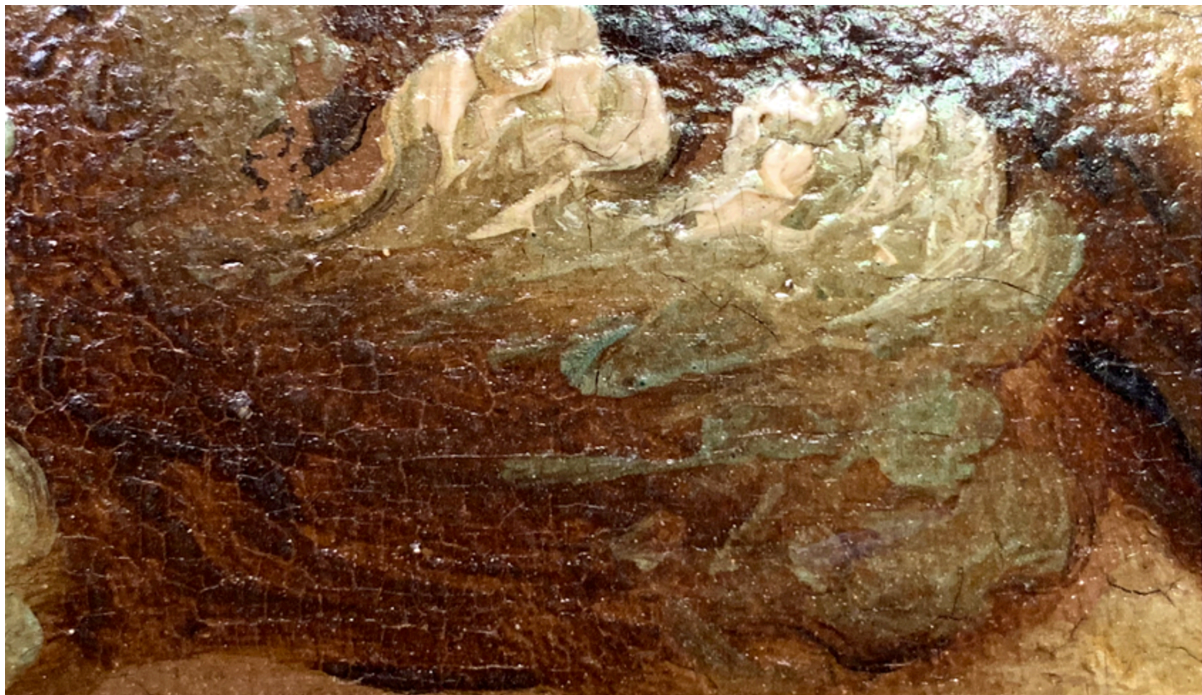


Fig. 10 The thick impasto imitates the movements of the leaves.

² The usage of “plumbonacrite” (a mixture of hydrocerussite $\text{Pb}_3(\text{CO}_3)_2 \cdot (\text{OH})_2$ and cerussite PbCO_3) is not a random effect.

Once again, the manner of painting is linked to the objective the artist has set himself. Here, the vegetation represented by the artist is not a naïve and redundant addition, but has an important symbolic significance. The gourd pictured among them symbolises the growth of love and faith, according to Scripture.



Fig. 11 Similar Impasto process for the vegetation in the lower center of the present painting and an impasto detail (a rosette (b-c)) from *the Portrait of Marten Soolmans* (a), 1634.

A sculptural effect for the treatment of gold details:



Fig. 12 The golden chain of the eunuch shows a visible surface relief and seems almost sculpted.

3-D with light impasto:

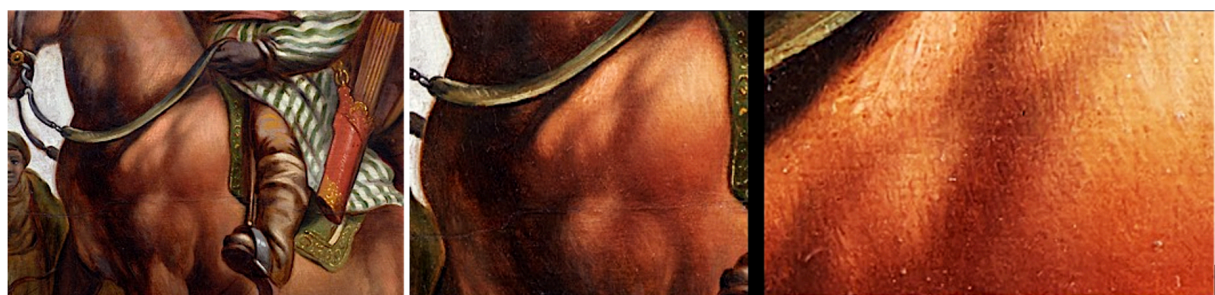


Fig. 13 The color modulation of the horse showing a powerful muscularity.



Fig.14 The quiver in red leather with gilded frieze and light with 'houding' around the stirrup and the heel of the boot of the commanding horseman, giving the illusion of a space between.

Textural variations: long fur with a touch of light in the background...(fig.15)



Fig. 15 lightly done brush strokes, with light playing over them.

... powerful expression of the horse muscularity through a smooth fur in the middle ground... (fig.16)



Fig. 16 Detail of the fur, showing how the 3D effect is produced.

...and a sketchy painted drawing, with the penetrating gaze of the white horse, over the apparent variable 'striae' of the wooden support.



Fig. 17 The painted drawing of the white horse showing an extraordinary glance.

